

The unfolding of your words gives light.

## The Temple of God

### An Exposition of 1 Corinthians

<sup>10</sup>According to the grace of God which was given to me<sup>a</sup>, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it<sup>b</sup>. But each man must be careful how he builds on it<sup>c</sup>. <sup>11</sup>For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ<sup>d</sup>. <sup>12</sup>Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay,

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<sup>a</sup> 3:10 **According to the grace of God which was given to me.** Humility is always in order for servants of Christ. Paul knew that his fruitful but difficult eighteen months in Corinth did not happen because he was a skilled church planter. He was always quick to deflect credit for his hard work and ministry successes to the one Who worked in and through him.

For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. Romans 12:3

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. 1 Corinthians 15:10

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things. Ephesians 3:8-9

For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me. Colossians 1:29

<sup>b</sup> 3:10 **like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it.** Paul had just told the people that they were God's building (3:9). This plays well into the biblical picture that the Church is the Temple of God.

The word translated "master builder" (*architekton*) comes from the source of our word *architect*. The word carries more the idea of a general contractor than an artist. Paul was a church planter in Corinth and when his time in Corinth ended others came and joined the work. He did not see his successors as rivals but coworkers.

This work of the ministry necessitates a "big picture" point of view. Not only do you need to share the work with others, you need to acknowledge that you will never see the finished product in your lifetime.

<sup>c</sup> 3:10 **But each man must be careful how he builds on it.** The word for "be careful" is one that often means *to see*. We might express a similar warning if we tell someone to *watch* their step. This is an off-handed warning to the servants in the church in Corinth, particularly the shepherds. Your place of service is more than a job. It is a sacred trust to care for something that does not belong to you.

<sup>d</sup> 3:11 **For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.** Jesus Christ is called the foundation because every true church is rooted in a common body of doctrine based on His identity and His work. We do what we do in church because Jesus told us to do it. The Lord used this same "foundation" word and the same illustration to describe the strength of lives built on doing what He says:

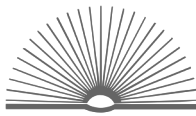
Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who has heard and has not acted *accordingly*, is like a man who built a house on the ground without any

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straw, <sup>13</sup> each man's work will become evident<sup>a</sup>; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work<sup>b</sup>. <sup>14</sup> If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward<sup>c</sup>. <sup>15</sup> If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire<sup>d, e</sup>.

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foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great."  
Luke 6:47-49

<sup>a</sup> 3:12-13 **Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident.** The list of building materials here goes from high to low quality and from not flammable to highly flammable. Becoming "evident" happens when something is shown for what it is.

<sup>b</sup> 3:13 **for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.** The meaning of the word "day," as it used in both Old and New Testaments, is determined by context. It can refer to a specific date on the calendar, a twenty-four hour period or to a generation or era. Here (see also 4:5) Paul is talking about a future day when God will judge His people. This could be a prediction of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, but more likely looks ahead to the final judgment of believers. The work you do in the kingdom may seem trivial but this text teaches that one day the quality of your work will be revealed and rewarded.

<sup>c</sup> 3:14 **If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward.** The identity of the reward itself is elusive. The text shows that the reward is more than some satisfaction a servant receives in this life. More likely Paul speaks of the "crowns" laid up for those who will one day hear "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Philippians 3:14; 2 Timothy 4:7-8).

<sup>d</sup> 3:15 **If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.** Just what it will look like to have your work burned the Bible does not say. Paul uses the word "loss," a word that means *to forfeit*. He used two forms of this word elsewhere to describe the things that had been taken away from him.

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ Philippians 3:7-8

<sup>e</sup> 3:10-15 The Lord Jesus always has the best interests of His Church in mind when He acts. He died for the Church. He disciplines the Church. He gave gifts to the Church in the form of servants who act on His behalf. This care for His sheep is what the Lord communicated to Peter when Peter needed direction following his repentance:

So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus \*said to Simon Peter, "Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me more than these?" He \*said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He \*said to him, "Tend My lambs." He \*said to him again a second time, "Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me?" He \*said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He \*said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." He \*said to him the third time, "Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus \*said to him, "Tend My sheep." John 21:15-17

This text is proof that Paul looked at the Church like Jesus looks at the Church. Local extensions of the Body of Christ are the primary way the Lord Jesus does His work in the world. This means you should take local church ministry very seriously. You are privileged to participate for a lifetime in the work of Jesus in this world.

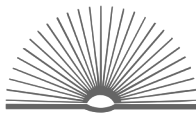
You need to recognize that God holds you accountable for the ministry He gave you among His sheep. Here are truths to keep before your eyes that remind you that only what is done for Christ will last. True statements:

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1. God has given you a ministry to perform in your local church. Do you believe that? You will see this in greater detail in 1 Corinthians 12.
  2. You cannot do this work in isolation. Just as body parts do not work in isolation, God's sheep are not healthy working alone.
  3. You do not get to set the rules for your ministry. The fact that there will be a judgment of your work tells you that there are loving boundaries to your ministry.
  4. Your service can outlast you. The fires of judgment spoken of here are for revelation rather than destruction.
  5. God sees and rewards faithful servants. Even if no one sees your labor, God does.
  6. There will be regret for those who are unfaithful. This does not make heaven an eternal discomfort for those who failed to make the most of God's gifts. It warns people right now that there are consequences to sloth.

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